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# THE HAUNTED HOUSE

BY ADA CAMBRIDGE

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This mortal house  
Which we are born into, is haunted by  
The ghosts of the dead passions of dead men,  
And these take flesh again with our own flesh  
And bring us to confusion.

EVEN in a Tennysonian setting the fact is too commonplace for words. But one must have a text, a starting-point.

Also, although facts be as obvious as it is possible for them to be, their bearings are not. Their meanings to our various minds, the ideas that roll and surge about them, in which thought may grope for ever without sounding bottom, are to them as fathomless seas to the ships they carry—ships that are perfect products of their day, to become imperfect tomorrow and obsolete the day after. Also again, like these in their buffetings with elements unknown, the most indisputable statements are apt to prove disputable in time, to give way to strain, to succumb to wear and tear, to be modified, discredited, superseded by new truths that are but the offspring in another likeness of the old. Anyway, it is useless to tell us to take things as we find them. Above all is it impossible to leave things alone. We cannot do it, and live.

This mortal house that we are born into—indubitably our own, our very self, and yet pre-empted by a horde of ancestral shades that invisibly dispute possession with us at every turn—if there be one thing more than another that is of perpetual personal concern to us, it is that. These “ghosts of the dead passions of dead men” which we are born not to be governed by but to govern—this mystery of heredity that is all one with the mystery of the Universe which nobody can reasonably ask to understand, but which we are bound to explore as far as we can go—herein is inexhaustible matter for philosophic thought, and the last word will not be said while a tongue can speak or a pen

write. This pen, however, indites no treatise on the subject, but merely gives utterance to one of those little reveries to which the elderly are addicted when they become onlookers at the game of life, the onlookers who are proverbially able to see more of it than they did when they were down in the arena taking an active part themselves.

The War, which is at the bottom of all our thinking nowadays, suggests the theme. The moral earthquake which has shocked open so many closed doors in our house of life, which has let light into so many unsuspected or long-forgotten hiding-places, reveals the character of some of the inmates we have been harboring and what their claim to board and lodging and a position of high authority over us amounts to.

There, dragged into the open at last, in the forefront of them all, is the figure of that mediæval swashbuckler, survivor from the days before men had learnt the rudiments of loyalty to their race, who has terrified us out of our very wits for a generation at least—a shape of horror indescribable. Why has he been “walking” all this time as if the world belonged to him, and we have not had the sense to see what he was made of? We are like the simple citizens in the old Spanish story of the Cid. When the Cid was dead and it was desired that the people should not know it, his corpse was set on horseback, propped between boards that were hidden under his gorgeous apparel, and led through the applauding streets; the people had only to see the familiar robes and trappings to take a living body within them for granted. So have we been imposed upon by the splendid clang of the regimental band and the magnificent spectacle of the March Past, by the power of immemorial traditions, the might of the revered dead hand. “What should we do with our younger sons if we had not the Army and Navy to put them into?” the ghost of the aristocrat of feudal times admonishes us. “Take away those schools of discipline and valor, which have turned out heroes innumerable, and what semblance of a manly life is left to them?” It sounds a posing question, if you can forget that armies and navies are not maintained for the benefit of younger sons. And you must forget something. Opinions are not formed by continually moving round and round an argument in the endeavor to look at all sides at once. And the direction easiest to follow is laid down by those

ghosts of the Past who, entrenched in our house while the Modern Spirit they oppose is still an outsider, are in a position to gull or cow us. And they say War is an integral part of civilized life—always was and therefore always must and will be—and never mind if it does devote the bulk and best resources of civilization to the perpetuation of savagery, in other words to the systematic defeat of its own ends. Logic and ethics cannot plead against unalterable facts.

They are all leagued together, these ghosts of the dead passions of dead men, to bring us to confusion. Who has been persuading us that younger sons of one set of human beings cannot work with their hands and earn their bread by the sweat of their brow like the younger sons of other-sets, and still be heroes if the heroic seed be in them? Why should a whole body of potentially fine young men, elder sons and younger, the former class cursed with too much, the latter with relatively too little, be tethered in unwholesome conventions and beset by subtle evil influences from which their happier fellows of the common herd are free? There are heads of "good" families who inherit with their estates a consciousness of high responsibility and labor to administer them for the benefit of others beside themselves; on the other hand there are very many who do not; and for one decent fellow provided with this job there are dozens and scores who have no job at all (outside the Army and Navy and in a rapidly lessening degree the Church) except to marry for money and enjoy themselves if they can. Suppose the "Services" closed to them, there remain as outlets for healthy activities but polo and steeplechasing, mountaineering and exploration, yachting, hunting—in short, a life of games.

And a life of games is really the life of the large bulk of the "leisured" classes (I am speaking of my own country, England), or it was so before the war; and the ghost-ridden sociologist has accepted the arrangement as part of the Constitution. But what a fine old ghost it is, apart from its high respectability, the ringleader of the spirits of dead-and-gone British sportsmen who stand for "the good old times" we are so prone to hark back to instead of attending to the times that it is our business to make better! I was myself brought up to revere the whole tradition of the Hunt. Father and mother both rode to hounds, and all my memories of

the Field—the pack, the horn, the red coats flashing through the naked trees and lighting up the winter landscape—have the heroic glamor on them. But in cold fact what a cruel and childlike business! In the gallant fox-hunter rides the ghost of the primeval savage who had to defend himself from fierce animals and ran down his daily dinner, the lust of the chase surviving by centuries and centuries the need and justification for the relentless pursuit and the kill. I am sure that many a kind fellow who joys to see the poor little red beast fighting his unequal battle and being torn to pieces at the end would lift a fly out of the milk-jug rather than see it drown. As for the pleasure and benefit to the horse, of which so much is made in the defence of fox-hunting—there is another dead and dusty plea. It may tend to improve his quality for the benefit of his owners, and he may enjoy it, but solicitude for his personal advantage is not a motive to lay stress upon. We see what we have done for the horse through the ages of his association and service with us when today, with his physical strength and powers of endurance, he is above all else a bundle of panic nervousness, always in terror of what is going to happen next and with no independent idea in his head except to run away. The ghost of the uncivilized human brute is his master still, and the S. P. C. A. allows it. I do not remember ever to have seen a hunter whose tail had not been cut off almost to the base.

For the first time within living memory there was no hunting season in the winter of 1914-15, as there was no Henley regatta in August and no Oxford and Cambridge boat-race in the following March. Tremendous changes! And the Masters of Hounds with their grooms, and the landlords with their tenants, and the elder sons with the younger, all the castes that have been so careful of their boundary-lines mixed up together in the mud-filled trenches and on the blood-drenched battlefields—they are fighting for elemental Right and the Liberties of the World, and in that business the best soldier is the best man, even as regards social status. New standards of values have come in with these terrific circumstances, to the confusion of the ghosts that have done the confusing for so long.

Is their reign over? Oh, pray Heaven we are seeing at least the beginning of the end of it! Pray God we remain brothers in peace that are now brothers in arms and sink

in that brotherhood all considerations of rank and race, creed and color—especially color, which represents one of the most mildewed and poisonous prejudices in the whole of our rotten stock. Why have we, right into these enlightened days, lumped together all the non-white peoples as “inferior races” without regard to any merit that is more than skin-deep? No reason can be found or invented except that it has been our habit to do so from time immemorial. How, we might ask ourselves, does our most conspicuous apostle of *kultur* compare with the Indian prince who, from the highest motives that can animate human action, offered unasked to the nation that had conquered him not only all his possessions but himself, to (with his traditions!) serve in the ranks with his own subjects? The Japanese man is a gentleman, tried and proved, and some whites of that rank who have been admitted into the “exclusive circles” of China have found their equals there also. All those peoples, we are apt to forget, had been civilized or at any rate highly cultivated, for ages upon ages, at a time when our forefathers were hairy savages in woods; and how have they not reproached us for our ill-breeding and our religion of words without deeds by their dignified patience under insult and the sincerity of their worship at the shrines that are their own! Whereas we have been calling them heathen and sending missionaries to them, and objecting to the tint of skins that in one case at least are the cleanest in the world. Of course, the idea of social and especially sexual intermixture with them horrifies us beyond words, although we freely admit that the science of eugenics is in its infancy as yet; but, amusingly enough, it never for a moment occurs to us that it may, with perhaps even better reason, be abhorrent to them. A Japanese gentleman provides his European guests with curtains, carpets, arm-chairs, all the stuffy things he thinks they like, but in quarters sufficiently detached from his own house to preserve the latter from contamination. With his fastidious regard for personal purity he feels that if he once admitted a relatively dirty white man into his private rooms he would never get them sweet again. A friend who has often been in large crowds of Japanese of the lower orders has told me that in closest contact they emit no odor of flesh or clothes, not to speak of their abstention from pushing and elbowing and the use of abusive language. I had myself

at one time a considerable acquaintance with the persons and manners of Japanese naval men, on their ships and ashore; high or low, and without an individual exception, they were physical health and fine courtesy incarnate. To watch the politely quiet bearing of a group of their "common" sailors on a crowded tram where white roughs of an equivalent class hustled and made fun of them was to feel very strongly that it would be well to leave off sending missionaries to the heathen and to see if we could not learn a little something from them instead. Mouldy precedents apart, the best men of the world are entitled to share and share with the best, irrespective of the color of their skins as of the color of their hair.

All the old thrones of Privilege, built for men who are now but ghosts, have been shaken to their foundations by this wild wind of destiny. They will have to be re-set, where not altogether rebuilt or altogether swept away—yes, from the bottom to the top, even to the topmost of them all. Of that, however, not much need be said. Monarchy has already (if unconsciously) come to rest on merit, except in an instance which not only proves this new-formed rule but is inevitably establishing it for all time. The outlook for the warring nations may be dark and dubious in many aspects, but if there is one clear point visible it is that no one man by virtue of a crown and sceptre will ever have the chance to make hay of the world's vital interests again. It is just a matter of words—the words that are the ghosts of things. Call King George President of the British Republic, and nothing whatever would be altered from what it is now, though we love the old name best because we are used to it. Let the Belgians, restored to their national life again, elect King Albert President of their new-born State; no title of honor could make him less honorable or more. The dignity of the one he wears is what he confers on it and not what it confers on him. When, soon or late, the World Council draws up its new Constitution (from which war is to be eliminated), it will be taken for granted that divine-right kingship is no more. The subject will be tacitly ignored as having no bearing on the deliberations. That ghost, at any rate, is "laid."

How we are governed by empty words!—thought-forms that once held something no longer there, but which we do not see is no longer there because the outside looks the same

and the outside is what matters to the unthinking mass of men. Take the subtlest, the most powerful, the most tenacious of these imposters—what we call “Christianity”—Christianity, that we are so anxious to convert the heathen to, because we say they cannot be saved without it—Christianity, that after two thousand years has brought the Christian world to *this*! Oh, poor Christianity, that preached brotherhood and meekness, what dastard crimes are committed in thy name! Here indeed is a ghost that does worse than lag superfluous.

When Christianity was the lovely ideal and inspiration of the peoples it came to, it meant Religion—Religion with the full significance of the capital R. Christianity was its habitation as well as its name. Christianity today is like a bottle corking up the perfume of a flower that has seeded into other fruit and other flowers; or like a pupa-case formed to last for ever on the theory that live things last for ever also without growth or change, instead of bursting out in new forms to increase and multiply. The contents have gone, but they are not lost, only elsewhere. Precious knowledge it is to the “so few” who, as Frederic Harrison puts it, “will listen to a religion that is not up in the sky,” that we have Religion still, renewed, revitalised. No longer “up in the sky,” whence its effect on the affairs of men has been worse than fruitless, but down on our poor diseased and blood-soaked earth itself, where it is needed and can be felt, a new Spirit of the Times moving on the face of the polluted waters, unwelcome as all new things that disturb the customary old, but here to stay and spread and work changes incalculable. The professional religionist, buttressed in his powerful traditions, does not see it or wish to see it, but it has been quietly busy under his nose this long time. It does not echo the prayers and precepts of Hebrew prophets and mediæval monks; it has no special caste; it knows no arbitrary “sacred” and “secular”; no hard-and-fast rules and regulations, no orthodoxy and heterodoxy, no thousand sects fighting one against the other, each one right and all the others wrong; no burning questions of high and low, Catholic and Protestant, this vestment or that; no consciousness of a “call” to the seat of judgment. It worships in deeds, not words; it devotes its energies and resources to the urgent business at hand—to raising the ideals of citizenship and the standards of munici-



pal, national, and international life, to increasing the common store of knowledge and developing the common intelligence to make worthy use of it, to bettering the conditions and character of mankind. In short, Religion is what it always has been and will be—unselfish goodness—which is not the same thing as the religion of church-going. Church-going in theory is the most direct incentive to goodness, but in practical result I have not found that it has the slightest effect upon conduct, while its effects on character seem often harmful, narrowing the mind and blunting the moral sense. As a clergyman's wife for over forty years I have had exceptional opportunities for observation, and I can honestly assert that this conclusion has been forced upon me quite against my will. However, it only means that Religion has outgrown the "Establishment," that it has come to another stage in its existence as a vital force to uplift the human race, as a child whose school-days are over comes to the serious business of its adult life. Certainly it does not mean that the Religion of sincerity and truth is not as substantial a fact as ever. The War itself is making proof of it. The good conscience of mankind has been called out by the shame and agony as a phoenix from flames.

What we are seeing, let us hope, is a vast Spring-cleaning, a thorough sweep-up of the dust of ages, a thorough turn-out of the holes and corners where our pernicious bogies have lurked unseen. Ghosts never "walk" in the fresh air and the open—everybody knows that; they are what doctors say tuberculosis is, essentially a house-disease. It is no use to inquire how they came into houses, flesh or stone; the origin of life itself would fall short of the ultimate, since there is no perceptible boundary line between living matter and the non-living from which it is derived; besides, all that was their business. Their own houses were their own. It is why they remain in ours, outstaying their day and usefulness, which is the question for us to consider. The doctors tell us, and we quite believe them, that the White Plague would vanish in a generation if we all took to living out of doors; so that it is quite our own fault if we keep it going. A few of us have come as near to profiting by the implied advice as irresistible adverse circumstances allowed, but in the main science has preached that gospel to deaf ears—those deafest of deaf ears that do not choose to hear (for a multitude of ghost-suggested reasons). We

go on building our material homes on the principle of the primitive tent, instead of covering them with a roof like a ship's deck, from which rain-water could run off just as well; where, with suitable parapets and weather screens, we could largely live by day and sleep by night in light and freedom and untainted air, with the precious additional advantages of family privacy and immunity from trespassers. We continue to dwell with the microbes in unventilated rooms, and to get ill and die before our time, for no reason in the world save that it is the custom so to do—the custom as laid down by the ancestral ghosts. As houses of brick and stone last a long time, and open ground space is limited and costly and liable to the incursions of midnight cats and tramps, Heaven knows when tuberculosis will be stamped out.

Besides, there is the furniture. Has anyone fully realized how we are enslaved by our domestic equipment—also organized on the lines approved by the shadowy oracle? “So sorry,” we plead regretfully, in response to attractive invitations, “but nobody else being at home I cannot leave the house;” and the inviters recognize an insuperable difficulty and say no more except to echo the regrets. What bodily and mental and spiritual profit in healthful outings, in free and happy hours, are eternally lost because we have to stay in to take care of the spoons. But there—you must have the “proper” things, and make a “proper” use of them. You must live like a gentleman, like a lady (meaning the sacred prototypes). Should one demur with a “Must you really?” the unanswerable reply is ready: “Oh, well, you know, you *have* to.”

Yes, yes—we know. And you have to pay formal calls in the proper manner, although each caller tells the other, who perfectly and as a matter of course agrees with her, that it is a horrid bore. And give proper dinner parties at great labor and expense, and go to them wearily, all fine clothes and artificial smiles, when your natural impulse is to slip on a loose gown (or coat) and spend the evening with a book at your own fireside. And dress in the fashion, which with all its vagaries never forgets to make you uncomfortable in some way or another. And generally fritter away your brief time and trifle with your one opportunity, and wrong not yourself only but your family and your country and the world and the race in a thousand ways that it is

impossible to touch upon. All at the instigation of a power you know to be in itself powerless, and yet yield to because others do—the others doing so because you do.

But a new day, please God, is dawning. A new era is emerging out of the hideous storm-welter of the blackest night in human history; a new world is in making for us. The darkest hour cannot shake our faith that Right is Might when all is said and done, and that precious blood poured out in its defence is never shed in vain. Liberty is going to be crowned afresh, invested with new power and authority; the enslaved nations are to be free as they never were before. We cannot doubt it—we dare not. So now is our time to break the little shackles with the big—now, or perhaps never. It is indeed the chance of our lives—of generations of lives—to Spring-clean our house, turn out the old tenants whose leases have so long expired, sweep up after them, and enter into full possession and enjoyment of what is nobody's but our own, this dear home of the soul, that should be content even if it is never to know another. So easy it would be if we all turned to, or if only enough of us would make the start! No wild exertions are called for. No violent revolutions are necessary. We have but to open doors and windows wide and let the clean fresh wind and clear light of day—*our* day—flow through. Ghosts are things of darkness and airless places; they vanish automatically when those shelters are taken from them.

At the least and worst, if we try to oust them and fail, we lose nothing. And who knows when he fails who only sees the beginnings of things and never the ends? While we are making our individual effort we are uplifting ourselves above puerilities, and that is half the battle. The mere contemplation of “higher things” takes our eyes off the lower. And no one can look away from these without arousing curiosity in the bystanders to discover what his object is. And so their eyes go upward too.

ADA CAMBRIDGE.